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5 **Guideline on the development and data requirements of**  
6 **potency tests for veterinary cell-based therapy products**  
7 **and the relation to clinical efficacy**  
8 **Draft**

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## 37 **Executive summary**

38 For cell-based veterinary medicinal products it is important to identify and link the biological activity of  
39 the viable cells, i.e. their mechanism of action, to the intended clinical indication. However, the  
40 complex biology of cells and the fact that they may exert multiple biological effects in the recipient can  
41 make it difficult to fully uncover and define a mechanism of action and subsequently determine critical  
42 potency-related attributes to test. Nevertheless, a potency assay should be able to detect clinically  
43 meaningful changes in the quality and/or quantity of the active ingredient in a cell-based veterinary  
44 medicinal product and should also serve as stability-indicating parameter.

45 Therefore, the aim of this guideline is to provide guidance on the requirements for developing and  
46 implementing a suitable potency assay or a combination of assays, which is linked to relevant  
47 biological properties of the cell-based product and further to clinical efficacy.

## 48 **1. Introduction (background)**

49 Rapid progress in the fields of biotechnology and medicine has led to the development of veterinary  
50 medicinal products containing viable cells. These cell-based medicinal products have the potential to  
51 treat various diseases where there is a previous unmet medical need. The evaluation of potency plays  
52 a key role in defining the quality of a cell-based product and is considered an integral part of the  
53 product development.

54 The primary objective of a potency assay is to provide a validated test which should mirror the  
55 biological activity of the product and by which the consistency of the manufacturing process can be  
56 effectively monitored and the quality of the final product can be adequately controlled at release and  
57 during stability studies, while providing a link to the clinical efficacy of the product.

58 A prerequisite for the potency development and the link to biological activity is that meaningful clinical  
59 efficacy data are generated in parallel through carefully designed and controlled clinical trials with  
60 relevant endpoints in accordance with currently effective clinical guidance documents. Clinical studies  
61 should also address any potential adverse effects on potency after administration, such as unwanted  
62 anti-drug antibodies (ADAs), which are not assessed through routine potency measurements.

## 63 **2. Scope**

64 The scope of the guideline covers the development of suitable potency assays for cell-based veterinary  
65 medicinal products and their link to clinical efficacy by taking into consideration the intended  
66 mechanism of action. Guidance will focus on the mechanism of action and potency determination of  
67 cell-based veterinary medicinal products, including assay development, surrogate measurements, data  
68 requirements, acceptance criteria, potential interference factors, and assay validation. Based on the  
69 mechanism of action that is most likely for the clinical indication, potency testing should aim at the  
70 cell-based product's most relevant biological properties. Consistent functional activity of the cell-based  
71 product in the recipient has to be ensured, and product potency (within justified limits) should be  
72 demonstrated by bioassay(s) based on defined biological effect(s) as close as possible to the  
73 anticipated mechanism(s) of action/clinical response.

74 Additionally, the guideline also highlights important clinical aspects that should be taken into  
75 consideration when developing the assay to ensure that the test adequately reflects the *in vivo*  
76 environment into which the cell-based product is administered.

77 All types of cellular medicinal products are considered within the scope of the guideline. This includes  
78 viable cell products of all origins (e.g. autologous, allogeneic, xenogeneic) and sources (i.e. starting

79 materials) that have been substantially manipulated, including, but not limited to, e.g. being  
80 expanded, genetically modified, differentiated, stimulated and/or digested from a tissue, and may also  
81 be relevant to cell fractions (e.g. sub-cellular fractions/cell organelles), if appropriate.

82  
83 For cell products, which are not within the scope of Regulation 2019/6, manufacturers may take into  
84 account the present guidance in the course of the development of their cell-based product, when  
85 applicable.

### 86 **3. Legal basis**

87 This guideline should be read in conjunction with the introduction and general principles of Regulation  
88 (EU) 2019/6 and Commission Delegated Regulation (EU) 2021/805 of 8 March 2021 amending Annex  
89 II to Regulation (EU) 2019/6 of the European Parliament and of the Council, the European  
90 Pharmacopoeia (Ph. Eur.).

### 91 **4. General considerations on the potency assay**

92 Establishing a potency assay with acceptance criteria is essential during product  
93 development/characterisation and should be an integral part of the work process as the product  
94 advances through laboratory, pre-clinical and clinical studies. During development, a broader  
95 combination of assays is generally recommended to be explored in order to identify the most  
96 appropriate assay(s) suitable for routine testing. The final potency test strategy should examine the  
97 intended biological activity of the cell-based product, which should be related to the clinical response of  
98 the treatment. The relation between potency testing and clinical efficacy has to be demonstrated as  
99 well as possible based on current scientific knowledge.

100 When developing a potency assay for cell-based products there are several challenges which are  
101 associated with the high complexity of these products. There might be an inherent variability of the  
102 starting material due to donor or cell line heterogeneity, the testing material and/or stability  
103 (particularly cell viability) might be limited, there is frequently a lack of appropriate reference material,  
104 and the mechanism of action can be very complex. This complexity, in combination with the individual  
105 variability of target animals receiving the treatment and potential variations in the environment at the  
106 site of administration (e.g. an ongoing inflammatory process in the recipient which could affect the  
107 biological activity of the product and hence the efficacy of the treatment), may lead to difficulties in  
108 identifying and establishing a suitable potency assay(s) and challenges to define clinically justified  
109 acceptance limits for the assay.

110 Despite the above-mentioned challenges, the results of a potency assay should provide assurance that  
111 the active substance is capable to induce a meaningful biological response, as demonstrated through  
112 clinical trials, and that the biological activity is consistent from batch to batch.

## 113 **5. Aspects on potency testing of cell-based veterinary** 114 **medicinal products**

### 115 **5.1. Mechanism of action/biological function**

116 Within the framework of the marketing authorisation procedure, a relevant mechanism of action for the  
117 indication has to be defined and substantiated. Moreover, it should be explained and demonstrated to  
118 which extent the claimed mechanism of action is linked to efficacy. This can be challenging due to the  
119 fact that the biology of cell-based products is often complex and may rely on multiple biological

120 activities, e.g. for mesenchymal stromal cells (MSCs) there is a general consensus that they migrate  
121 towards lesions and support endogenous MSCs, secrete mediators and show immunomodulatory,  
122 angiogenic, antiapoptotic and/or antifibrotic activity. During development, a thorough characterisation  
123 of the cell-based product must be performed. This exercise should cover relevant attributes related to  
124 phenotype and function to support the mechanism of action hypothesis, including e.g. molecular,  
125 biochemical, immunologic, phenotypic, physical and biological properties. The design and development  
126 of the potency assay should then be based on this pre-clinical characterisation in combination with  
127 information from e.g. early clinical studies, available historical experience, and scientific literature. In  
128 order to support the link between the selected potency assay and clinical efficacy, bibliographical  
129 references, *in vitro* assays, clinical proof-of-concept studies and clinical field trials should be applied.  
130 A discussion on pharmacodynamic effects and the mode of action in the intended use might be of  
131 importance in establishing a relevant potency assay reflecting a functional characteristic of the cells as  
132 well as a basis for the choice of relevant endpoints for determination of efficacy.

133  
134 When literature data is used to support the proposed mode of action and potency measurement, a  
135 substantial justification of the relevance for the intended cell-based product and of the correlation  
136 and/or causality between the potency test and the proposed mode of action as stated in the Summary  
137 of Product Characteristics (SPC) has to be provided. Furthermore, critical manufacturing steps (which  
138 are often not well-described in literature or adherent to GMP) and starting materials have to be  
139 comparable and justified in relation to the cell-based product in question due to the inherent  
140 complexity of these products and the effects that manufacturing differences might have on critical  
141 quality attributes. Overall, given the above stated issues regarding the complexity of cell-based  
142 products and their manufacture, bibliographical references might be used to support mechanism of  
143 action and potency assay definitions and development, however, this must be corroborated by  
144 product-specific data obtained during development using the cell-based product.

145  
146 In conclusion, the proposed mechanism of action and the suitability of the potency assay to measure  
147 relevant cellular characteristics that are linked to clinical efficacy and safety should be supported by  
148 data resulting from relevant *in vitro* and/or *in vivo* studies performed on the cell-based product. A clear  
149 link between the proposed potency assay and the biological activity of the product as well as, as far as  
150 possible, the efficacy and safety of the product used in clinical trials should be established.

## 151 **5.2. Development of potency tests/assays**

152 Establishing a potency determining assay is an integral part of the product development. In addition,  
153 monitoring and/or controlling potency during development is also necessary to demonstrate  
154 consistency between batches, to assess comparability of different manufacturing processes and/or  
155 various assays, and to be able to link batches to biological activity and product efficacy.

156 Given the complex biology of cell-based products, it is strongly recommended to explore a broad set of  
157 possible potency-indicating methods early in development, in order to be able to identify and, in later  
158 phases of development, focus on the assays that are deemed most relevant for the mechanism of  
159 action and linked with clinical efficacy.

160 For product stability, a stability indicating potency assay should be used during storage to determine  
161 the shelf life of the product.

162 Overall, the development of a potency assay should start as soon as possible, i.e. with the beginning of  
163 product development on a quality basis. A suitable potency assay should be available at the time of  
164 release of batches of the product to be used in preclinical and early clinical studies in order to be

165 subsequently qualified in clinical trials and hence to substantiate a link between the measured clinical  
166 parameter and a relevant characteristic of the cells and to determine potency limits.

167 Throughout all phases of product and process development manufacturers/developers are  
168 recommended to ask for scientific advice at the Agency (EMA) and/or NCAs.

### 169 **5.2.1. Data recommendations during product development**

170 For cell-based products under development it is acknowledged that only preliminary data may be  
171 available when clinical trials are initiated. However, a certain amount of information on quality covering  
172 for example identity, purity, potency and stability, is expected. With progress in clinical trials,  
173 knowledge on product potency should increase as more data become available. In this context a  
174 progressive potency assay approach can be pursued. Literature data can also be supportive in early  
175 stages of development to establish a stepwise plan to acquire necessary product specific knowledge  
176 (See also section 5.1). Further guidance can be found in the "Guideline on human cell-based medicinal  
177 products" (EMA/CHMP/410869/2006) and the "Guideline on potency testing of cell-based  
178 immunotherapy medicinal products for the treatment of cancer" (EMA/CHMP/BWP/271475/2006  
179 rev.1).

180  
181 As a first step the active substance should be defined together with the critical quality attributes of the  
182 product. This can be achieved by thorough product characterization during preclinical and early clinical  
183 investigations in order to gain insight in product parameters that might impact quality, potency,  
184 stability and batch-to-batch consistency. During early product development phases limited quantitative  
185 information on biological attributes may suffice and wider acceptance ranges for the potency test could  
186 be accepted if adequately justified, however, these should be adjusted along with ongoing product  
187 experience and development. A qualified potency test method should be in place for early clinical trials  
188 as well as for proof-of-concept studies. Importantly, a suitable potency reference standard should also  
189 be established as early as possible and used during the assay development.

190 With increasing product and process knowledge, appropriate limits and/or ranges should concurrently  
191 be established for potency, based on product-specific data, so that it can be assured that the  
192 manufacturing process produces well-defined, biologically active and consistently processed product  
193 batches for use in clinical trials and that a clinically justified potency range for the final specification  
194 can be established. Furthermore, acceptance criteria should also be set and used for stability studies in  
195 order to define a respective shelf life.

196 A validated potency assay should be in place at the latest for the conduct of pivotal clinical trials.  
197 In each case where an assay is replaced by another, it is important to conduct comparability testing in  
198 order to bridge the data obtained using different assays and to demonstrate comparable assay  
199 performance.

### 200 **5.2.2. Potency assay development and surrogate measurements**

201 The potency test for release should preferably be performed on the formulated drug product. Potency  
202 measurements upstream in the process, e.g. at the level of MCBs, cell stocks or as IPCs, may be  
203 important and informative for control of the manufacturing process but are often not sufficient to  
204 conclude the potency of the final product. For instance, manufacturing steps (including e.g. cell  
205 expansions or freezing-thawing) downstream of the test point may impact the finished product  
206 (biological activity/ functionality) which would not be detected if only measuring the potency upstream.  
207 The final test strategy, including stage of testing should be justified.

208 Potency assays can either directly test the biological activity or alternatively be a surrogate  
209 measurement (the latter is described in section 5.2.2.2 of the guideline). A direct measurement  
210 requires a functional assay that adequately mimics the clinical mode of action. At marketing  
211 authorisation application, the link between the test assay(s) and clinical efficacy should be well  
212 motivated, justified and supported by quality and clinical data. When experimental animal models are  
213 available, they can in addition to clinical trial data, also help to build the support of a link between  
214 biological activity (functionality) and *in vitro* potency measurement. While *in vivo* potency testing  
215 methods may be suitable for product characterisation, *in vitro* testing is, when possible, strongly  
216 recommended as a more feasible approach in line with 3R for batch release. 3R principles should  
217 always be taken into account when conducting *in vivo* studies.

#### 218 **5.2.2.1. Assay combinations**

219 A single biological or analytical assay may not provide an adequate measure of potency, e.g. when the  
220 product has a complex and/or not fully characterized mechanism of action, multiple active ingredients  
221 and/or multiple biological activities, limited product stability, or when the biological assay is not  
222 quantitative, not sufficiently robust or lacks precision. Therefore, if one assay is not sufficient to  
223 measure the product attributes that indicate potency, an alternative approach could be used, such as  
224 developing multiple complementary assays that measure different product potency attributes  
225 associated with quality, consistency and stability. When used together and when the results are  
226 correlated to a relevant biological activity, these complementary assays can provide an adequate  
227 measure of potency. Such a collection of assays might consist of a combination of biological assays,  
228 biological and analytical assays or analytical assays alone. This may include assays that give a  
229 quantitative readout (e.g., units of activity) and/or qualitative readout (e.g., pass-fail). If qualitative  
230 assays are used as part of an assay combination to determine potency for batch release, stability or  
231 comparability studies, they should be accompanied by one or more quantitative assays.

#### 232 **5.2.2.2. Surrogate measurements**

233 Development of a quantitative biological assay that directly mimics the *in vivo* mode of action for cell-  
234 based products may be complicated and challenging due to the properties of the product and/or  
235 technical limitations of certain assays. In cases in which development of a suitable biological assay  
236 covering the exact mode of action is not feasible, it may be necessary to identify a surrogate  
237 measurement of biological activity, provided that a link between the surrogate and the defined  
238 biological activity has been demonstrated, as determined in *in vitro* or pre-clinical studies relevant for  
239 the clinical setting.

240 When an analytical assay is used as a surrogate measurement of biological activity, sufficient,  
241 scientifically sound product-specific data should be provided to establish a correlation between the  
242 surrogate parameter and the biological activity related to potency.

243 Surrogate analysis may comprise different kinds of tests including, but not limited to, methods that  
244 measure immunochemical (e.g., quantitative flow cytometry, enzyme-linked immunosorbent assay),  
245 molecular (e.g., reverse transcription polymerase chain reaction, quantitative polymerase chain  
246 reaction, microarray) or biochemical (e.g., protein binding, enzymatic reactions) properties of the  
247 product, thereby determining cell surface markers, activation markers, secretion of factors, expression  
248 of single gene products or protein expression patterns. A marker that is relevant and robust to the  
249 activity of the product should be identified and characterised.

250 Cell count and viability are important quality attributes of cell-based products, although they are not  
251 sufficient to predict potency and thus efficacy alone. Of note, for some cell-based products, potency

252 may be directly affected/correlated with cell viability, which is a critical parameter of product integrity,  
253 and may in such cases also be integrated as one important element in the strategy to define the  
254 potency of the product (e.g. activity per viable cell).

255 When using a potency assay that measures gene expression of a potency marker, it should be  
256 considered that gene expression does not necessarily correlate with protein expression (e.g. post-  
257 transcriptional, translational and degradation regulation). Therefore, in order to support the possible  
258 link between gene expression and efficacy, additional *in vitro* characterisation at protein level (e.g.  
259 ELISA, Western Blot, etc.) might be performed – provided that specific commercial antibodies or  
260 antibodies with confirmed cross-reactivity are available to demonstrate that an increase of mRNA  
261 levels leads to a correlated increase in the corresponding protein levels. However, gene expression  
262 alone may be suitable as a surrogate marker provided expression of the gene alone can be linked with  
263 efficacy.

264 A direct relationship between a relevant biological activity of cells and the level of the specific  
265 surrogate markers proposed as potency indicators should be demonstrated, i.e. the expression of the  
266 surrogate marker representing the potency should be linked to efficacy.

267 If a relevant surrogate marker and assay is identified and validated as a potency test it may replace or  
268 orthogonally support other potency assays at release, however, this should be justified on a case by  
269 case basis.

### 270 **5.2.3. Potency assay performance: Validation and interferences, reference** 271 **materials and controls, acceptance criteria**

272 Developers/manufacturers are requested to establish and validate an appropriate test to measure the  
273 potency at the final product and/or active substance level to show consistency of production, stability  
274 of active substance and finished product and to detect if the manufacturing process is appropriately  
275 controlled.

#### 276 **5.2.3.1. Validation and interferences**

277 A potency assay should be validated latest at the start of pivotal clinical trials and in line with VICH  
278 GL1 and GL2 regarding e.g. accuracy, precision, repeatability, specificity, sensitivity, linearity and  
279 range, system suitability and robustness. The assay should, as far as possible, be quantitative  
280 (absolute or relative compared to a suitable control). Assay validation should be undertaken with  
281 internal materials traceable to reference materials (e.g. supplied by NBISC, JCTLM, etc.), if available  
282 (see also chapter 5.2.3.2.1). Consideration should further be given to the replacement of assay  
283 reagents and reference materials to ensure the consistency of manufacture.

284 The assay variability has to be taken into account, whether it is method- or product-related. Factors  
285 that should be taken into consideration include the batch variability, at which product level the assay is  
286 to be performed (e.g. at master cell bank (MCB), drug substance (DS) or drug product (DP) level) and  
287 the condition of the cells at these different stages (cell count/viability). A high variability of the assay  
288 method has to be justified and the impact of this variability on the batch to batch consistency should  
289 be discussed.

290 Moreover, validation of the assay should be performed in the intended final matrix. Interference of  
291 other components with the active substance has to be considered, e.g. bovine serum, antibiotics or  
292 DMSO used in cell culture and as freezing agent respectively, as cell viability may be impacted and  
293 thus the efficacy of cells. Matrix effects should be assessed.



294 Furthermore, the influence of freeze/thaw episodes or storage time/conditions and transport time  
295 should be taken into consideration when establishing the ideal sampling time before testing for potency  
296 analysis.

297 Regarding the product variability, attention should also be given to the selection of donors, as age,  
298 sex, health state (e.g. systemic or acute or chronic diseases, genetic diseases, tumours, etc.) as well  
299 as certain medical treatments can, e.g. influence the biological properties of cells which might have an  
300 impact on potency. Donor choice (autologous or allogeneic) and donor selection criteria should be  
301 carefully framed and justified. Overall, internal and external factors can impact cell performance  
302 negatively which is in consequence represented in the results of the potency assay and further in  
303 inferior clinical response.

#### 304 **5.2.3.2. Reference materials and assay controls**

305 While donor-derived variability can be expected considering the nature of the product, the method-  
306 derived variability and its impact on assay performance should be extensively investigated to evaluate  
307 the consistency of batches produced from different donors.

##### 308 **5.2.3.2.1. Reference materials**

309 For this purpose, appropriately qualified reference standard material should be used throughout all  
310 phases of development, as well as in routine production after marketing authorisation. In the absence  
311 of international reference standard preparations, in-house standards have to be established and  
312 appropriately qualified and the choice of reference standard has to be justified. Therefore, relevant and  
313 sufficiently standardised reference cells should be established to ensure the suitability of the test.  
314 Relevant reference material may include well-characterised clinical batches or other well-characterised  
315 materials prepared by the manufacturer or another source that have been appropriately qualified. In  
316 line with "Guideline on potency testing of cell-based immunotherapy medicinal products for the  
317 treatment of cancer" (CHMP/BWP/271475/06) the in-house reference materials should be  
318 characterised in terms of their composition, purity and biological activity as thoroughly as possible by  
319 physico-chemical-biological methods. The in-house reference material should preferably be clinically  
320 qualified or shown to be comparable to materials demonstrated to be efficacious in clinical trials.

##### 321 **5.2.3.2.2. Assay controls**

322 In parallel to the use of appropriate reference standards, suitable negative controls should be  
323 established and described for the assay. This could e.g. be undifferentiated cells, untreated cells, or  
324 cells which do not secrete/express the intended potency marker or have no relevant biological activity.  
325 The negative control materials should consist of the same matrix as the cell-based product itself, e.g.,  
326 if the product is cryopreserved with DMSO, the negative control should also contain DMSO. In any  
327 case, a sufficiently qualified and justified control should be used.

328 Moreover, all substances apart from the active ingredient, which are used in the manufacture of a cell-  
329 based product, should be identified in the context of their own biological activity, e.g. if plasma is used  
330 as solvent.

331 Also, for the potency marker itself, e.g. when measuring a cytokine in the cell supernatant, a  
332 sufficiently characterised reference standard should be used, when feasible, e.g. regarding identity and  
333 purity.

334 When feasible, in order to enable a link to clinical results, negative control materials and/or comparator  
335 products should be administered to a respective animal control group in the course of clinical trials.

336 For clinical sample collection and testing the requirements of the Guideline on Bioanalytical Method  
337 Validation (EMA/CHMP/EWP/19221/2009 Rev.1 corr.2) should be taken into account.

### 338 **5.2.3.3. Acceptance criteria**

339 To ensure consistent functional activity of the product, clinically justified limits should be established  
340 for the potency assay. In general, a thorough characterisation and preclinical assessment should  
341 support early clinical trial potency acceptance criteria. It is recommended that as much as possible of  
342 the assay development is performed as early as possible in the product development and that a wide  
343 range of potency batches are characterised and examined preclinically before heading into clinical  
344 trials. For early clinical studies, it is generally accepted to have wider limits which can then be  
345 tightened as product- and process-related data are collected. Clinical data will further support the  
346 strategy for setting the final batch release limits. At the time of marketing authorisation application,  
347 the acceptance criteria for potency determination must be clinically justified. Ideally, the release limit  
348 should be justified based on the lowest value for the potency marker in an efficacious batch tested in  
349 clinical studies or alternatively it must be clinically justified by other means. Where feasible, a potency  
350 range should be established, including upper and lower limits based on efficacy and safety data, which  
351 have to be defined in the course of assay validation studies and justified. The proposed potency assay  
352 and its acceptance limits must enable the identification of batches with sufficient biological activity to  
353 elicit a clinical effect.

354 Clinical trials and/or proof-of-concept studies should be conducted to show, as far as possible, a link  
355 with efficacy and/or establish the minimum and maximum amount that is efficacious and safe.

356 In addition, the potency assay should demonstrate to serve as stability-indicator of the product, and an  
357 appropriate limit for the end of shelf-life set. The effect of freeze-thaw episodes after storage should  
358 also be considered in terms of the stability-indicating potential of the potency assay. The proposed  
359 potency test should be able to monitor the stability of the active substance and the finished product to  
360 ensure that it remains potent throughout the proposed shelf-life. A potential drop-off in activity during  
361 storage should be included in the calculation of the stability specifications.

### 362 **5.3. Important aspects on the relation between potency assays and clinical** 363 **efficacy**

364 The objective of the potency assay(s) is to ensure that each final product batch can provide  
365 comparable clinical effect(s) to those demonstrated in the (pre-)clinical studies. Clinical data are  
366 essential to establish the relationship between the biological function that represents the mechanism of  
367 action of the product and a potency assay that can be used for batch release, stability and  
368 comparability investigations. It may potentially also be necessary to acquire some additional clinical  
369 data post approval in cases of substantial changes in the manufacturing process where the potency  
370 assay may need to be re-validated with new clinical data.

371  
372 Generally, there is no single assay that adequately measures those product attributes that predict  
373 clinical efficacy. Therefore, developers/manufacturers have to demonstrate that the cell-based product  
374 induces the proposed clinical effect under the conditions of use described, i.e. substantial evidence of  
375 clinical efficacy. For example, when the product is intended to be used in the treatment of tissue  
376 regeneration, its regenerative and/or immunomodulatory effects (e.g. cell-cell-contact functions,  
377 secretion of anti-inflammatory agents such as chemokines, interleukins, inhibition of cell proliferation,  
378 etc.) should be considered in the characterization and assay development. The selected assay must be  
379 adequately justified for the specific product. For this purpose, suitable and appropriately controlled  
380 studies have to be performed by using a consistently manufactured product. On the other hand,

381 efficacy data from appropriately controlled clinical studies can provide evidence that a cell-based  
382 product is biologically active and is thus potent.

383

384 With regard to *in vivo* investigations, it has to be noted that studies in laboratory animals might be  
385 challenging since representative models are often not available, e.g. when using MSCs for the  
386 treatment of osteoarthritis or tendon lesions. Nevertheless, *in vivo* studies are crucial to gain  
387 knowledge on the clinical performance of cell-based products and should therefore be deliberately  
388 designed and conducted. When planning *in vivo* investigations 3R considerations should be taken into  
389 account, i.e. the number of animals used should be as low as possible. The use of more animals in  
390 certain studies may help to establish a relevant potency method and limits and could therefore be  
391 considered justified.

392

393 On the other hand, *in vitro* studies mimicking the *in vivo* situation of the respective clinical condition  
394 (as far as possible) might provide important supportive information and reduce unnecessary use of  
395 animals.

396

397 Overall, most emphasis should be given to clinical studies.

### 398 **5.3.1. Influence of the *in vivo* environment**

399 Since biological functions of cells depend strongly on the environment of the cells and potency assays  
400 should measure cell properties relevant to the mode of action, it is considered important to reflect  
401 anticipated environmental conditions in the design of potency assays. Relevant environmental  
402 conditions may be derived from existing literature data or from pre-clinical studies.

403 Examples of key environmental conditions include (but are not limited to): ongoing inflammatory  
404 processes at the injection or graft site, effects of inflammatory cytokines as well as oxygen level and  
405 partial pressure.

## 406 **Definitions**

- 407 • **Biological activity:** The specific ability or capacity of the product to achieve a defined biological  
408 effect
- 409 • **Potency:** The measurement of the biological activity using a suitable quantitative biological assay  
410 (i.e. potency assay), based on the attribute of the product which is linked to the relevant biological  
411 properties
- 412 • **Mechanism of Action:** Specific biochemical interaction through which a drug substance produces its  
413 pharmacological effect, e.g. specific molecular targets to which the drug binds, such as an enzyme  
414 or receptor
- 415 • **Mode of Action:** Therapeutic activity, intended biological effect of a (cell-based) product - functional  
416 or anatomical changes, at the cellular level, resulting from the exposure of a living organism to a  
417 substance
- 418 • **Potent batches:** Batches with a biological activity that lies within its predefined acceptance criteria  
419 and provokes an expected clinical response
- 420 • **Substantially manipulated:** Cells or tissues have been subject to substantial manipulation, so that  
421 biological characteristics, physiological functions or structural properties relevant for the intended  
422 regeneration, repair or replacement are achieved, e.g. processes that modify biologic  
423 characteristics, physiologic functions or structural properties of the cells  
424 The following manipulations are considered "non substantial": cutting, crushing, shaping,  
425 centrifugation, soaking in antibiotic or antimicrobial solutions, sterilization, irradiation, cell

426 separation, concentration or purification, filtering, lyophilisation, freezing, cryopreservation,  
427 vitrification.  
428

## 429 **Abbreviations**

430 ADA Antidrug antibody  
431 DMSO Dimethylsulfoxide  
432 DP Drug Product  
433 DS Drug Substance  
434 ELISA Enzyme-linked Immunosorbent Assay  
435 EMA European Medicines Agency, within the text named "the Agency"  
436 GMP Good Manufacturing Practice  
437 IPC In-process control  
438 JCTLM Joint Committee for Traceability in Laboratory Medicine  
439 MCB Master Cell Bank  
440 MSC Mesenchymal Stromal Cells  
441 mRNA messenger ribonucleic acid  
442 NBISC National Institute for Biological Standards and Control  
443 NCA National Competent Authority  
444 PCR Polymerase Chain reaction  
445 3Rs Reduction, replacement, refinement in the use of animals for investigative and regulatory  
446 purposes  
447 SPC Summary of Product Characteristics

## 448 **References**

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452 [fault.htm](http://www.fda.gov/BiologicsBloodVaccines/GuidanceComplianceRegulatoryInformation/Guidances/default.htm).)  
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